

76 Ek. Military file

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

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ABM Debate Recalls Ike's Warning

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and Jack Anderson

The words of Dwight D. Eisenhower that will longest be remembered undoubtedly will be his Jan. 17, 1961, warning to the American people to be wary of a military-industrial alliance.

How true his words were can be ascertained from a review of the facts, most of them hitherto unknown, regarding the anti-ballistic missile system and how it was first okayed by the White House.

It first got the green light from President Johnson in 1967 when he had received rosy intelligence reports about an early end of the war in Vietnam and began looking ahead to the postwar problems that would follow dismantling the Vietnam war machine. His advisers warned that the weapons industry couldn't be permitted to slow down too abruptly without endangering our military-industrial base.

This was Mr. Johnson's frame of mind when the Pentagon began making its strongest push for the ABM system. The generals brought him pictorial evidence that the Russians were going ahead with ABM construction, argued that the United States must keep pace. Congressmen whose constituencies would benefit from ABM contracts added to the pressure.

The anticipation of a postwar slump was a big factor in

swaying the President. He felt that the ABM system, which would bring new business to as many as 3000 firms, would take up the expected economic slack in the vital electronic-missile industry.

He was mindful too that 1968 was a political year and that a favorable decision might also bring in some campaign contributions from grateful contractors.

Mr. Johnson announced the ABM program in his January 1968 budget message. A few days later, the Tet offensive shattered optimism over an early, triumphant mop-up of the Vietnam fighting.

Changing the Excuses

From the first, the advocates had trouble justifying the ABM system. First, they claimed a "thin line" of anti-ballistic missiles was needed to defend the country against an irrational attack from Communist China. They began construction, however, on a site in Massachusetts, a state located in a corner of the United States least threatened by the Red Chinese.

The ABM advocates, hastily backpedaling, next explained that the sites were necessary to protect our cities not only from the Chinese but from the Russians. While acknowledging that a "thin line" could not stop a missile bombardment

from the Soviet Union, they suggested it could knock down misfired missiles that might accidentally drop upon a city.

There was an outcry from the cities, however, whose residents seemed more concerned that an ABM missile might backfire than that a Soviet missile would misfire. They feared that the short-range Sprint missiles, in particular, would intercept incoming warheads too close to the cities and contribute to the destruction they were supposed to prevent.

Once again, the advocates abruptly backpedaled and started back around the mulberry bush. Now, they said, the ABM sites were needed not to protect population centers but to defend the unpopulated areas where our Minuteman missile silos are located.

Inquisitive Senator

At a recent session of the Senate Armed Services Committee, where the doors were closed to permit complete candor, Missouri Sen. Stuart Symington asked how the Pentagon had planned to protect the Minuteman sites a month earlier when the ABM system was still going to be deployed around cities instead of silos.

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird hemmed and hawed, then turned the question over to Deputy Secretary David

Packard. He also hemmed and hawed. The essence of his answer was that the Pentagon previously had means to protect the silos from a Soviet knockout blow but that the ABM system would offer better protection.

But the \$84,000 question is whether the ABM system is really needed for defense or as a sop to the military-industrial complex whose appetite for defense dollars is never sated. Already, 22,000 of the Nation's largest manufacturers are major defense contractors. Another 100,000 firms contribute through subcontracts to the Nation's weaponry. Together, they employ 10 per cent of the Nation's work force.

This comprises a lobby that wields tremendous political power, particularly in the Congressional districts where the defense plants are located. Even the most economy-minded Congressmen are seldom against Federal spending in their own constituencies.

They should remember, however, Dwight D. Eisenhower's last words as President:

"This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in American experience. (Its) total influence, economic, political, even spiritual, is felt in every city, statehouse, every office in the Federal Government."

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